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NEWS

number of young men gaoled

ed, understaffed s take the strain

recruiting professional and technical staff for building and maintenance.

The condition of Britain's prisons is likely to be unaltered for some time. Of 56 prisons opened before 1930 only 10 were in good physical condition, 39 were fair and seven were poor.

The report quotes two governors' remarks about their buildings: "The prison is drab, shabby and in dire need of a massive injection of resources to recoup some of the years of neglect, in order to preserve this valuable property in which the prisoners and staff, living and working in Dickensian conditions, continue to suffer."

Another governor said of his prison: "There is nothing wrong with this prison which he expenditure of several million pounds could not put right."

A list of projects which will pen in the 1980s is prefaced by a warning that they will not necessarily add places to the system.

An increasing rate of deterioration in the former wartime camps and the Victorian prisons like Liverpool and Wormwood Scrubs meant few additional places would be added.

"They will simply compensate for places lost elsewhere. They are not therefore likely to reduce the amount of cellaring and, although most of the cellular projects will have legal sanitation, that will not make the practice of slopping-out much less extensive elsewhere."

The numbers of men sharing cells in 1978 rose to 15,823 in March, when 5,061 were sleeping three to a cell. This was out of a total of 27,933 adult men at the end of 1978. In women's prisons the facilities for mothers and babies were fully used, with units accommodating up to 30 babies at any one time.

An increase in secure units and a net gain in staff, however, provided some "welcome relief" to the small number of women's prisons widely scattered throughout the country.

The 91 gaoled under Section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act represented an increase of 82 per cent over the past five years. The Act is used for gaoing people under 18 for murder and juveniles for grave crimes which in adults would merit at least 14 years' imprisonment.

The number of times prison officers' branches took industrial action increased from 42 in 1977 (and 19 in 1975) to 119 in 1978. After the serious disturbances the last Government set up an inquiry by Mr Justice May.

The industrial action is blamed for the huge increase in the loss made by prisons. The loss on trading account for 1978-9 is estimated at £4.9 million compared to £2.8 million the previous year. The "strains within the system" and interruptions to production continued to restrict output, the report says.

Report of the work of the Prison Department 1978. HMSO Cmnd 7619, £3.25.

ndemned by lawyers

given a non-immediate custodial sentence."

The society, an organisation of Socialist lawyers, describes the present provision of bail as derisory and says that most of those at present handed to prison could be released safely and cheaply in hostels.

It is the lack of a securely-located address which so often results in refusal of bail, the society suggests.

The society claims that it

is not that the court is genuinely considering a custodial sentence but to give the offender a taste of being "inside."

"Nowhere is this abuse of power more prevalent than in juvenile courts," says the society. "The number of under-17s on remand was 4,072 in 1977. Of these, 202 were remanded in adult prisons, imposing unjustified additional pressures on the juvenile and on prison staffs not trained to

Shade of Oswald visits friend in Britain

The latest investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy, which suggests a conspiracy by organised crime, has brought renewed fear to a former US marine who now lives in Cheshire.

Nelson Delgado was a corporal in the marine corps in charge of Private Lee Harvey Oswald who was considered by the Warren Commission to have acted alone in killing the President.

In a report published earlier this month, however, the House of Representatives' assassination committee criticised the Commission for neglecting the evidence of a possible conspiracy and the indications that Oswald's shots that day in November 1963 might not have been the only ones.

Mr Delgado, a Puerto Rican who considers himself to have been Oswald's closest friend in the army, has always maintained that Oswald was an unlikely assassin and too poor a shot to have fired possibly six rounds in rapid succession on that day.

"We all had to qualify as marksmen in the marines," he said yesterday. "Oswald only just scraped through in the marksmen category when we were tested on the range. Many others of us got better ratings as sharpshooters or experts. In our last test, when I watched him from behind Oswald scored 192 to my 234."

Mr Delgado told all this to the Warren Commission but his evidence and that of 26 other marine colleagues, appeared not to influence the Commission's final report. Most of the other 26 are now dead. Many were killed in Vietnam but others have died in mysterious circumstances.

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So Mr Delgado, who came to live with his English born wife in Warrington when he left the marines in 1977, feels threatened. "If they're now saying that the assassination was a conspiracy after all the whole thing could start up again. I believe I could be seen as a threat once again. If the CIA or the FBI had any part in the conspiracy they would want nothing in their way to destroy their cover."

When the FBI interviewed Mr Delgado after the assassination, he says pressure was applied to try to make him change his testimony about Oswald. "They attacked my competence to judge his character and shooting ability and criticised my efforts to teach him Spanish."

In the early 1960s both men were interested in Cuba and Mr Delgado says that mail from the Cuban Consulate in Los Angeles, used to be addressed to Oswald at the radar-scanning unit in California where they were both stationed.

Mr Delgado admits that he has no evidence beyond that of Oswald's character and his well-known incompetence with firearms. "But the conspirators may think I know more than I do." So he has made a sworn affidavit of that information and of the events that have happened to him since. "That is my insurance policy. If anything should happen to me now, people will know."

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